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ABSTRACT

Much research has focused on the concept of resilience, which is defined as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging circumstances. To examine resilience in school children, small group interviews were conducted with 9-12 year-old children (N=125) drawn from five primary schools in South Australia. The groups were composed of three or four children and who were asked broad questions around four construct areas: (1) tough life (at risk environment); (2) kids with a tough life who are "doing OK" (displaying resilience); (3) kids with a tough life who are "not doing OK" (displaying non-resilience); and (4) protective factors that contribute to the different pathways. The interviews were also conducted with 25 teachers in the schools. In comparing the definitions of resiliency arising out of dialogue of children and their teachers, it became evident that similarities and differences existed both within and across coded categories. Two of the most prominent themes were those of relationships and beliefs. Analysis of these themes supports the position that resiliency is a multi-faceted construct with critical contextual and perceptual dimensions. The report recommends community programs that are contextualized for an Australian urban community and, most importantly, arise out of the perceptions of school children. (MKA)

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Resiliency:
A Comparison of Construct Definitions Arising From Conversations With 9 Year Old - 12 Year Old Children and Their Teachers

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Background

In 1995, 32 schools within the socio-economically disadvantaged northern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia formed the Salisbury Plains Coalition of Schools. These schools contain many children who are considered to be 'at risk' socially and educationally due to their exposure to a range of conditions in their environment linked to poverty, family breakdown, and chronic unemployment. Many of the difficulties faced by these children seem to impact negatively on their behaviour and performance at school.

Concerns about schools' responses to the problems experienced by these children prompted the Salisbury Plains Coalition of Schools to plan research in local schools into the incidence of off-task student behaviour, teachers' and children's views on the problem, and what could be done to reduce it.

To help frame the research effort, collaborative links were established with the Faculty of Education, University of South Australia. Preliminary meetings took place towards the end of 1995 between the researchers and a Salisbury Plains Coalition of Schools sub group responsible for the initiative.

During these early discussions it became apparent that 'the problem' as framed - students being off-task - implicitly assumed that the ultimate purpose of research in the area would be to help teachers identify and implement classroom management-type interventions that reduced student off-task behaviour. While it was agreed that this practical focus would be supported by most teachers grappling with the increasing management demands of larger classes, it excluded any serious consideration of other factors which influence children's attitudes and behaviour, both negatively and positively. Such a narrow 'deficit' focus was seen to be overly behavioural and technical, classroom rather than school, family, or community oriented, and inherently negative.

After considerable discussion about the full range of influences on children's behaviour at school, it was decided to broaden the focus of the research to

consider issues of student resiliency within an ecological framework, rather than limit research to classroom off-task behaviour. By searching for the positive influences on student behaviour at school, the project began with the aim of avoiding portraying students from disadvantaged backgrounds in negative, deficient, and patronising ways. Rather, it began with the aim of focusing on the strength and resilience of communities and individuals who emerge from adversity intact, possessing problem solving skills, social skills, autonomy, pride, a sense of purpose, and belief in the future.

At this stage, a formal and collaborative research project was established between the University of South Australia and the Department for Education and Children's Services to explore issues of student resiliency within an ecological framework. Funding for the project was sought, and was received, from the Australian Research Council and a full-time project officer was allocated to the research for 1997 by the Department for Education and Children's Services.

The study investigated how children and their teachers construct and understand the notion of childhood resiliency. The study examined in some detail what both groups of participants believe resiliency to mean, framed within the elements of nested systems, along with what they believe contributes to it, and how it can be identified and promoted.

A greater understanding of how both teachers and children view this construct will provide a better framework for devising programs designed to promote resiliency in children from backgrounds who have traditionally been considered at risk.

Theoretical Frameworks

In recent times, research has been conducted into childhood *resilience*, a term which, according to Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) is defined as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Rutter (1990: 181) suggests the term refers to '...the positive pole of the ubiquitous phenomenon of individual difference in people's responses to stress and adversity'.

The historical bases for the concept of invulnerability or resilience were established in the early 1970s (Garmezy 1971; Garmezy and Neuchterlien 1972; Garmezy, Masten, Nordstrom and Terrorese 1979; and Anthony 1974) and investigations of specific populations of resilient children followed (Garmezy 1974; Anthony 1987; Werner and Smith 1988; Garmezy and Rutter 1983). In these later studies the subjects were children who were classified as being at risk of psychiatric disorders, delinquency, and other negative life outcomes because of a variety of individual, family, and environmental factors (e.g. neonatal stress, poverty, abuse, physical handicaps, alcoholism, and criminal activities). Rather than focusing on those children who were casualties of these negative factors, however, the studies focused instead on those who had not succumbed. The questions this work asked were: What

is it about these children that enables them to survive? What makes them apparently immune to the factors that negatively affect others? Instead of focusing on individual deficit, the new approach focused on individual strengths and, thus, the concept of resilience emerged in the psychological literature.

A strong feature of the published research on resilience has been the identification of both internal assets of the individual and external strengths occurring within systems in which the individual grows and develops; both are frequently referred to in the literature as *protective factors* (e.g. Garmezy 1985, 1994; Rutter 1987; Gore and Eckenrode 1994) or *protective mechanisms* (Rutter 1987). Just as risks have been identified as cumulative, protective factors seem to have the same cumulative effect in individuals' lives. The more protective factors that are present in a child's life, the more likely they are to display resilience.

Internal assets or protective factors that consistently appear in the literature in describing common characteristics of the resilient child are such things as social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and a future (see Waters and Sroufe 1983; Garmezy 1985; Rutter 1980, 1984, 1985; Werner and Smith 1988; Masten, Best and Garmezy 1990; Gore and Eckenrode 1994; Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence 1994).

External assets or protective factors have been described in relation to three primary systems in the child's world - family, school, and community. In relation to the family, many of the protective factors identified by research clearly relate to the consistency and quality of care and support the child experiences during infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The work of Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston (1979) shows that another source of external protective factors can be the school. Children in discordant and disadvantaged homes are more likely to demonstrate resilient characteristics if they attend schools that have good academic records and attentive, caring teachers. Other studies have also shown the important role that individual teachers can play in resilient children's lives (Geary 1988; Werner and Smith 1988; Coburn and Nelson 1989). In relation to the community, children in disadvantaged areas are generally considered more at risk than those in more affluent areas. However, certain community characteristics seem to operate as protective factors. The strength of social support networks provided by kin and social service agencies, for example, is one such factor (Pence 1988).

Many researchers argue that caring and support across all three external systems is the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence (West and Farrington 1973; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston 1979; Rutter 1984; Garmezy 1985; Anthony 1987; Masten, Best and Garmezy 1990; Rhodes and Brown 1991; Gore and Eckenrode 1994). Caring and support establish the basis for trusting relationships throughout life, a factor identified earlier by Erikson (1963) as the foundation for healthy future development.

Some researchers have delineated more specifically the range of factors that promote resiliency. The Search Institute in Minneapolis has gone so far as to isolate 40 developmental assets that they suggest each young person needs to succeed in life. The Institute even proposes that, ideally, a community should strive to ensure that all youth develop 31 or more of the 40 assets (Benson, 1996).

These attempts to identify and quantify protective factors in individuals, families, schools, and communities, have prompted some researchers to urge caution over their application. Rutter (1990: 12) is concerned that the research into resilience is seeking to 'distill everything down to a few key global composites'. Garmezy (1994) is also among those researchers who have raised cautions about the dangers of quick-fix programs arising out of the current resiliency research and sees a danger in the possible representation of the findings as validating the 'American Dream', the mistaken view that any person, irrespective of background or environment, can succeed if they only work hard enough. Benard, (1993) shares that concern in fearing that

> the movement toward resiliency - toward creating family, school, and community environments rich in the protective factors of caring, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation - not dissolve into more add-on, quick-fix programs and strategies. (Benard, 1993: 10)

In the field of education, many writers have taken up the notion of resilience and have developed programs and policy recommendations, based on the research findings reviewed above (Benard 1991, 1995; Winfield 1994; Comprehensive Teaming to Assure Resiliency In Children 1996; Henderson and Milstein 1996; Henderson 1997). The Comprehensive Teaming to Assure Resiliency In Children project[1] (1996), for example, suggests that school efforts designed to support resilience can be organized into five general strategies. First, schools, through their personnel, should offer opportunities for students to develop significant relationships with caring adults. Secondly, schools should build on social competencies and academic skills, thus providing children with experiences of mastery and success. Thirdly, schools should offer opportunities for students to be meaningfully involved and have responsible roles both within the school and the community. Fourthly, schools should work to identify, collaborate with and coordinate support services for children and youth and finally, schools should do no harm, that is they need to ensure that their structures, expectations, policies and procedures do not add to the risks already faced by students. These general strategies are then broken down into quite specific suggestions for action. In relation to the first strategy, for example, it is suggested that schools establish a mentor program, decrease class sizes, keep

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1 Comprehensive Teaming to Assure Resiliency in Students is a project developed within the Health Related Services section of the Minneapolis Public Schools and has produced the handbook **Moving Beyond Risk to Resiliency: The School's Role in Supporting Resiliency in Children** (1996).

students with particular teachers for extended periods of time, and so on (Comprehensive Teaming to Assure Resiliency In Children 1996: 12).

Empirical work attempting to identify precisely what makes a school effective in promoting educational resilience supports many of the recommendations described above, particularly in relation to patterns of organizational and behavioural characteristics (Freiberg, Stein and Huang 1995; Oxley 1994; Wang, Haertel and Walberg 1994; Yancey and Saporito 1995). Comparative studies also show significant differences between inner-city schools that are more effective in achieving student outcomes over time and those that are less so (e.g. Freiberg, Stein and Huang 1995; Wang, Carter, Trice, and Schweizer 1995). Generally, this research indicates that what make the difference between effective and ineffective schools are direct practices over which classroom teachers have greatest control. These include practices relating to such things as students' cognitive abilities, motivation and behaviour; classroom management, climate and student/teacher interactions; the amount and quality of instruction. By contrast, the variables that are remote from the learning setting (e.g. school and district demographics, state and school policies) have the least influence (Wang, Haertel and Walberg 1993, 1994).

Some of the most interesting work relating to the promotion of school success has been reported by the Center on Education in the Inner Cities at Temple University, Philadelphia (Wang 1997). Adopting an explicitly ecological perspective which views inner-city children and their families as a subsystem of a much larger ecosystem[2], The National Center on Education in the Inner Cities looks at ways in which school success is supported by linking families with resources in their communities. They have been particularly interested in projects that provide social and health services to needy children and how these services can be coordinated with those provided by schools and other educational institutions. After surveying a number of successful initiatives that have implemented a coordinated approach to service delivery, Wang (1997: 16) claims that

> no single component or practice can account for improvements - rather, the crucial element is the way in which successful practices are combined in an integrated system of delivery that considers the needs of the students and the site-specific strengths and constraints.

A final point concerns whether it is also important to consider if there are other criteria which children, as opposed to adults, use to judge risk or resilience. As Winbourne and Dardaine-Ragguet (1993: 195) say:

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2 The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) views the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment. From this broader perspective, the environment is seen as a series of nested structures made up of the *microsystem* (the child's immediate environment), the *mesosystem* (interactions among microsystem factors), the *exosystem* (factors in the wider community) and the *macrosystem* (consisting of values, laws, customs etc.).

A major shortcoming of many studies in this area is the apparent disregard for viewpoints of children targeted in the research.

A potential problem with research that assumes that all participants share the same definitions of risk and resilience is that policies and programs will be developed that are based, with the best of intentions, on adult interpretations and perspectives. If children do indeed have different understandings, then the success of interventions designed to promote their resilient characteristics is likely to be compromised.

In summary, research into the question of risk and resilience has certainly identified the fact that a large percentage of children whose lives expose them to diverse kinds of physical and psychic risk, in fact 'defy the odds' and go on to lead conventionally-defined 'successful' lives. The work of the key scholars in the field has helped to identify those internal and external factors or mechanisms that appear to protect children from the consequences of risk and the school clearly emerges as one site where those protective factors can be operationalised. The school, however, is but one system within which the child is located. The literature reviewed here also demonstrates the importance of the family and the neighbourhood/community as rich sources of protective factors. Some studies clearly show the need for interactions between and across these separate systems (e.g. Wang 1995, 1997). Working alone, it seems, schools can contribute significantly to the resilience of children, however, working together with families, agencies and industries even more can be achieved (Natriello and Collins 1993; Wang 1995; Rigsby, Reynolds and Wang 1995).

It would seem clear, then, that any new work in the area should adopt an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979); it should be grounded in local communities and it should take careful account of the values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of those who are being studied.

Research Plan

The research was planned so as to investigate how teachers and children construct and understand the notion of childhood resiliency. Small group interviews were conducted with one hundred and twenty five, 9 - 12 year old children drawn from 5 primary schools in the Salisbury Plains Coalition of schools. Teachers in each school nominated twenty five students whom they perceived to be a representative cross-section of children in their classes. Written parental consent was obtained for each child who took part in the interview process.

In groups of 3 or 4, using a guided conversational interview schedule and a spiraling DPC (define/personalise/challenge) frame, children were asked broad questions around four construct areas and systems elements (i.e., home, school, wider community, and self) within each area. Their discussions were audio-taped.
The four construct areas were:

1) 'Tough life' (at-risk environment)
2) Kids with a tough life who are 'doing OK' (displaying resilience)
3) Kids with a tough life who are 'not doing OK' (displaying non-resilience)
4) Protective factors that contribute to the different pathways

The interview protocol is detailed in Figure 1.

Teachers in each of the five schools were also asked to volunteer to be interviewed. Twenty five participants were randomly selected from the list of volunteers and were individually interviewed. The interview protocol used with the children was also used with the teachers. Interviews for both children and teachers were conducted in the home school.

Children's and teachers' responses were transcribed from audio-tape. We knew when we planned the research that we would collect a great deal of qualitative data that would present us with logistical and conceptual challenges related to data management and analysis. In response to these challenges, we established a comprehensive NUD•IST (QSR, 1997) project containing all of the interview data and a very preliminary indexing scheme based on the range of questions and responses raised during the interviews.

Considerable mysticism surrounds the process of coding text data (Richards & Richards, 1987). Effective coding depends on the division of the raw data into manageable chunks of meaning ('text units' in NUD•IST). This is known as unitising or segmenting the data into the smallest pieces of information about the issue being investigated. The process of grouping together coded data into categories ('nodes' in NUD•IST) is known as pattern coding ('indexing' in NUD•IST) and allows a researcher to build a schema ('index tree' in NUD•IST) that depicts emerging relationships within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 68).

The four sections of the interview protocol provided the initial theoretical framework for coding the text. However, an increasingly detailed hierarchical system of categories and subcategories 'emerged' as two procedures were used, more or less simultaneously, to code teachers' and children's responses. The first of these procedures used NUD•IST's powerful word and string search capability to locate and index text around each 'find'. For example, wherever 'relationships' was located in the text, several lines of text above and below each 'find' were retrieved and coded as 'social relationships'. To complement this extremely helpful but fairly mechanistic process, a second procedure was used to code transcripts 'by hand'. This involved reading and categorising segments of text and instructing NUD•IST to code these segments along with other text identified during word search procedures. This ensured that all relevant text was coded, even when key words were not used by respondents (for example, the statement - 'I want to be graphic designer' - was coded as 'Sense of purpose/job'). The final coding scheme contained over 200 categories.

Figure 1

RISK

Questions

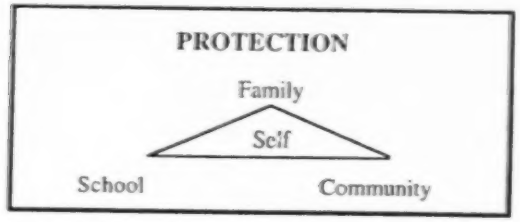
D: What does 'tough life' mean to you?

D: What makes life tough for some kids?

D: How do you know when a kid has a tough life?

P: Think of a kid you would describe as having a tough life? Tell me something about that person.

C: What's the toughest life you can imagine in Adelaide?



RESILIENCE

Questions

D: Describe this protection in your own words

D: How can a kid's family give them this protection?

D: How can a kid's school give them this protection?

D: How can a kid's community give them this protection?

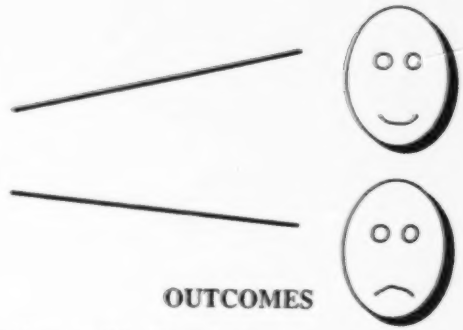
D: What protection comes from inside kids? How?

P: Think of a person who has lots of protection. Use the triangle to describe what's happening for them.

C: How can this protection be strengthened?

C: How can this protection be weakened?

C: Why do some kids have more protection than others?



OUTCOMES

'Doing O.K' Questions

D: What does 'doing OK' mean to you?

D: How do you know when a kid is doing OK?

P: Think of kid you would describe as having a tough life but is doing OK. Tell us about this kid.

C: How do you think these kids will turn out in the future? Make some predictions.

C: What could happen in these kids lives that could change all of that?

'Not Doing OK' Questions

D: What does 'not doing OK' mean to you?

D: How do you know when a kid is not doing OK?

P: Think of a kid you would describe as having a tough life but is not doing OK. Tell us about this kid.

C: How do you think these kids will turn out in the future? Make some predictions.

C: What could happen in these kids lives that could change all of that?

ACTIVITY: GUIDED CONVERSATION

TOPIC: RESILIENCE

AGE: 9 to 12 year old

FRAME:

DEFINE	D
PERSONALISE	P
CHALLENGE	C

Using this scheme, coded sections of each interview were then retrieved (along with other identifying information about respondents) and analysed to discern patterns, trends, common themes, inconsistencies, and idiosyncrasies in teachers' and children's understanding of the concept of resiliency.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

The concepts of validity, reliability, and objectivity are linked with empiricism with its emphasis on accurate representation of 'reality', procedural replication and researcher neutrality. Within this paradigm, valid research is distinguished from invalid research by establishing the extent to which 'valid' and 'reliable' research measures and procedures are used during the research process.

When early qualitative researchers were confronted with demands to demonstrate the credibility and dependability of their research, several opted to adapt criteria from the empiricist paradigm and apply them to their interpretive studies (see, for example, LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984[b]). However, rather than adapt and apply essentially positivistic criteria to qualitative research, Marshall (1990) rejects the empiricist position on research verification when applied to qualitative research. She argues that other means of judging worth need to be developed that are consistent with the underlying assumptions of qualitative research. She proposes a consensual approach to the development and application of common 'goodness' criteria for qualitative research. The guidelines which Marshall developed were used in this study to ensure its quality and credibility. Briefly, this involved:

- explicating the methodology in detail;
- adopting a non-judgmental 'emic' perspective during data collection and analysis;
- adopting a self-reflective perspective to identify personal biases and assumptions;
- making explicit the connections between the raw data and the generation of higher order themes and ideas;
- tolerating ambiguity and searching for alternate explanations, checking out negative instances, and using a variety of methods to check findings;
- acknowledging the limits to generalisability, while, at the same time pointing out the possibilities of the transferability of findings;
- preserving data for re-analysis;
- presenting data and findings in a form that is accessible to participants, other researchers, and policy makers.

(Marshall, 1990: 193-5)

These criteria have been used to establish the 'goodness' of other qualitative research (Johnson, 1995; Howard, 1996).

Discussion of Findings

In exploring definitions of resiliency, numerous elements of risk and resilience arose out of the conversations with the children and their teachers. These elements formed the basis of the constructed NUD•IST categories and are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2. In comparing the definitions of resiliency arising out of the dialogue of children and their teachers, it became evident that similarities and differences existed both within and across the coded categories. When 'listening across the categories' for definition, it also became evident that 'themes of resilience' were present. Two of the most prominent themes were those of relationships and beliefs. In order to compare several of the similarities and differences in the definitions of children and their teachers, these two themes will be examined in detail in this section along with possible implications.

Relationships

Both within and across systems, the importance of relationships in fostering resilience was one of the strongest and most enduring themes in the dialogue of children and teachers alike. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979) suggest that caring and support across all three external systems is the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence, and Glasser (1998) argues that the key to the vast majority of human misery is the inability to locate and sustain satisfying relationships with one or more other people. The words of both children and teachers in defining resiliency appear to support these positions. Words and phrases that spoke to the critical place of healthy relationships in resiliency appeared across most of categories set out in Table 1 and 2. Both teachers and children spoke of the importance of relationships both now and in the future.

> I think that relationships, being able to form positive relationships with people, being able to connect with people is a key to it. I often have deep concerns about children who don't seem to be able to make that human connection with others, whether it's students or adults (Female, 30-34)

> The ones who will probably succeed are the ones with support and the ones with a strong family relationship (Girl, 10).

Children and their teachers often described the key to getting through 'tough lives' as having a caring and supportive relationship somewhere within either the family, school, or community setting. More often than not, they talked of connections between people across these settings as providing the necessary support. As was true for the 10 year old girl above, most of the other children described the importance of strong relationships within the family, immediate or extended, as a key component of resiliency. The importance of family relationships was also prominent in the dialogue of most teachers.

Risk: Elements Arising Out Of Interviews
Coded Categories in NUD•IST

What puts children at risk?

SELF	FAMILY	PEERS	SCHOOL	COMMUNITY
• Personal Characteristics Birth Order Gender NESB Aboriginality Disability • Trauma Drugs Disability Pregnancy Death of a loved one High mobility • Negative self-beliefs	• Physical circumstances Poverty Living arrangements • Family structure • Family dysfunction Violence Instability Withdrawal of emotional support Sibling bullying • Parenting practices Lack of guidelines Excessive/unjust demands • Complex lives Overwork Competing responsibilities	• Isolation Geographic Social • Bullying, harassment, teasing • Appearance elements • Inappropriate role models • Lack of social skills • Victim perspective	• Poor teacher-student relationships • Low teacher expectations • Academic failure • Disruptive behaviour • Unsafe environment • Alienating school cultures • Home-school disconnections	• Bullies/gangs • Little sense of community • Lack of facilities • Limited future opportunities Employment Educational

TABLE 2

Resilience: Elements Arising Out Of Interviews
Coded Categories in NUD•IST

What influences resilience?

SELF	FAMILY	PEERS	SCHOOL	COMMUNITY
• Beliefs about self Self esteem Self efficacy Sense of purpose Positive attitude Self confidence • Coping behaviours Problem solving Actively engaged Persistence Reflectivity Sense of humour • Innate strength of character • Innate academic ability	• Love Parents Siblings Extended Family • Support Material Emotional • Parenting practices Consistency Expectations • Modelling resiliency Parents Siblings Extended family • Links with school School success Problem solving	• Having friends Intimate Peer group • Peer characteristics Supportive Common interests Common experiences Spend time Sharing Helpful Talk with/listen	• Teachers Relationships Knowledge of kids Knowledge of learning Behaviour management Sense of efficacy High expectations • Support Time Peers Other adults Agencies • Supportive Climate/Culture Child-focused Collaborative Caring Safe/Secure Empowering • Curriculum Relevant Enriched Age-appropriate • Special programs Social Academic	• People Supportive Protective • Sports and clubs Positive self-identity Belongingness Opportunities for success • Agencies Supportive Protective

> I suppose that's probably the main things that we would see, just that there's some sort of support, or somebody at home that they could go to, only it might not be a parent, it might be an older brother or sister or an uncle or grandparent, but just someone there that the kids know that you've got some relationship developed with not only them but people at home. That seems to be really, I hate to use the word but, crucial (Female, 40-44).

In addition, although both teachers and children identified adults and peers in the family, school, and wider community as potential providers of this support, teachers more frequently named adults in the school setting first in their descriptions.

> If they form an excellent relationship with an adult at school, I think that can make a huge difference, or it could be that together with that person they've got another one in the family or a close friend or whatever where they've also got another support when they're not in school (Female, 50-54).

Children were more likely to emphasise peers and family members in their descriptions of protective mechanisms for children. Some children even included pets in their descriptions of supportive relationships, a source of support absent from the descriptions of teachers.

> You've got probably one to four friends and then the teachers are picking on you because you do a few bad things. They tell all the other teachers and then in the school yard when you're playing it's like everything collapses, but at home your family's real loving and stuff, and you've got a nice pet that you can sort of release what you did at school (Boy, 11).

Relationships within families in the Salisbury area are often complex and complicated by conditions of poverty, chronic unemployment, and family breakdown. Despite these problems, many teachers and children spoke, not only of the complexities and difficulties, but also of the strength and power of relationships in many families, both immediate and extended, that enables them to cope with the 'tough lives' in which they find themselves.

> If a parent is not very strong within themselves, if a parent's having a really hard time, perhaps with other children, and everything's all unstable and muddled, that's when it's really difficult for a child to cope. The little girl that had to cope with the father that tried to commit suicide, has a very strong mother, and very strong grandparents, and mum says: 'This has happened. It's not nice, but we're going to cope with it. What can we do now?' That kind of attitude---it's amazing (Female, 25-29).

In support of the shifting nature of resiliency, many children spoke of strong and positive relationships cut short by either a change in the family structure or death of a loved one. Death of a loved one was only mentioned indirectly by a few teachers. In contrast, the children mentioned it frequently in their discussions. One student described the potential impact in this way:

> When I was in about, I don't know, grade one, she was in about grade seven or something, her mother gassed herself in a car. You could tell that she wasn't very happy, because usually she's skipping around, she's laughing, she's doing all the things she probably knows how to do, and when she came back the next day she was just---she couldn't do anything. She couldn't even do her work. She was just too upset to do anything, so she went home. She had to. She went home to her dad, and a couple of years later she moved, because she didn't want to stay around where her mum had died (Boy, 10).

Although both teachers and children included the importance of peer relationships in their dialogue, again and again, children spoke more often of peer relationships first and foremost in their descriptions of protective mechanisms.

> School friends because they can sort of in their own way relate to what you are going through, like if you say my parents keep on arguing and everything, well surely some time in their life their parents must have argued and they must remember how they felt when that happened--- but usually adults, they are harder to talk to. Like about person things because the things that they went through that you are going through, that happened so many years ago and was different (Girl, 12).

Numerous educators, among them Nehring (1992) and Kohn (1993), have argued that children are too often absent from the structures of schooling. In the main, school and schooling are designed by adults, with children being viewed as the passive recipients of the resulting designs. In the vast majority of schools, adults are responsible not only for the design, but also for the delivery and maintenance of teaching, decision making, and problem solving structures. The voice of the children in this study would again appear to challenge the validity of that thinking. For these children, the power of peer relationships in the process of resilience is evident. To effectively utilise that power in constructing schooling that is more relevant and useful to children may be one of the greatest challenges to educators. Many programs and structures designed to use 'peer power', including class meetings, student representative councils, peer counselling, cooperative learning, and peer facilitation have been promoted by educators (Myrick 1997; Kohn 1993; Glasser 1965). Several of these programs were mentioned by the children and teachers in this study as having a place in their schools. Beyond implementing such programs, schools and schooling that is designed more frequently 'with and by' students than 'for' students may require more radical changes that will only occur with a dramatic change in the culture of schools. Such a process may require far more time and commitment than many educators who share the vision of 'peer power' presently envision (Finnan & Levin 1994; Sizer 1989).

The importance of peers in providing care and support is often explained by children, as well as teachers, as arising from a better understanding of their backgrounds and experiences. It is a struggle for this understanding and the

importance of this understanding in strengthening relationships that comes through in the dialogue of many of the children and teachers.

> Some teachers understand what we're going through, our life. Sometimes we might be distracted but she keeps on trying to teach us (Boy, 12).

> I think we have to be really aware that what we perceive and what we value, is not necessarily what these children, and what the families of these children value. So it's getting to know the community. . .it's just building that relationship which is so important (Female, 25-29).

For some teachers, this struggle for understanding of the children in the Salisbury area leads them to question even the nature of what defines a strong and healthy relationship in the community in which they work.

> It could be that there are support mechanisms at home that we perhaps are not aware of because we might fall in to the stercotypical view that from what we see on the outside leads us to believe that the support and the care isn't there (Female, 40-44).

For the children, too, it is this understanding that is more likely to result in stronger relationships, or at least tolerance, of their peers.

> . . .having a hard life and everything and then they'll realise that you're only upset because something's happened in our family or something, and then they think, 'Oh, they're having a hard life I better not pick on them (Girl, 11).

As another student puts it, "we won't pick on that particular person" (Boy, 11). The words 'that particular person' suggest that there are many others who will be picked on instead.

One of the biggest differences in the talk of teachers and children in describing relationships in both risk and resilience situations is the frequent mention of bullies by the children and the virtual absence of it in the dialogue of teachers. Children talk frequently of 'getting bullied at school', 'getting bashed up' and the perception of some that 'no-one really does anything about it'. The picture painted by one student was echoed by many others:

> . . .and then they say that they have an older brother or a gang that could come out and get you and it makes you worried sometimes, but you can tell sometimes that that wouldn't happen anyway and sometimes there's gangs around here that don't make you feel very safe, and they come out and bully kids and older folk and general people just walking around when they just want to be by themselves (Boy, 10).

For so many of the children, one of the most critical factors in strengthening healthy relationships and resilience in young people across the community lies in, as one 12 year old girl said, "making sure the bullies don't bully them".

One of the key correlates of effective schools set down by Edmonds (1979) was an atmosphere which is free from threat of physical harm. It appears that such a climate is just as critical in fostering resilience for these students in the Salisbury area today. Rigby (1996) has documented the extent of the bullying problem in Australian schools.

> As a rough generalisation, taking into account variations between age, gender groupings and schools, about one student in five has reported being bullied, either physically or psychologically, at least once a week. In some schools it is as high as one in three. . . Even in the schools where 'preventative' measures have been put in place, bullying remains a problem, and cases of bullying continually come to light (Rigby, 1996: 71).

Historically, schools have approached the problem from three different perspectives: (a) moralistic, (b) legalistic, and (c) humanistic. Whatever the adopted approach, it appears from the children's dialogue that the extent of the problem in the Salisbury area may well mirror the figures set down by Rigby. The limited mention of bullying in the teacher dialogue raises questions about adults' awareness as to the extent of the problem. Intense programs of retraining South Australian teachers and students in the areas of harassment and bullying have occurred over the past few years. Questions can also be asked about the extent to which this retraining has reduced the behaviours or simply led adults to believe 'something is being done' and led students to create more sophisticated techniques of bullying and harassment.

Allied to the bullying, children frequently mentioned 'tough life' elements of peer relationships connected to appearance factors such as speech, clothing, and disabilities that result in teasing and harassment.

> Well, I've got a friend too and he can't speak properly and he says my name, instead of saying, 'time', he does it with a 'D' and everyone teases him about it (Boy, 10).

> Another group of people. . .say' Look at her. She's got no Adidas. She's stupid' and all of this (Girl, 12).

> Yeah, but because he was disabled no one would like him much (Boy, 10).

As with bullying, reference to 'appearance elements' such as these rarely appear in the dialogue of teachers. Langlois (1986) reports that one of the most pervasive findings of research on peer relationships is that the degree of popularity within a group is related to a person's physical attractiveness. Lessons designed to teach tolerance of physical difference have often held center stage in programs for personal, social, and emotional learning (Elias et. al. 1997). Beyond the overt curriculum, such tolerance and acceptance has been a cornerstone for educational reformers such as Sergiovanni (1994) who argues passionately for creating schools as communities that show care and respect for the full range of human diversity. At a time when the face of most Australian schools continues to reflect increasing diversity, the

dialogue of these students would suggest that physical differences arising from that diversity, seldom mentioned by teachers in this study, continue to play a major role in the acceptance or rejection of peers.

In addition to the absence of bullying, harassment, and teasing, it is the presence of 'talking and listening', in ways that are encouraging and helpful, that provides evidence to many of the children of healthy and strong relationships across family, school, and community settings. Children talk frequently of this type of 'talking and listening' at home

> They could perhaps just sit them down and talk about solutions to the problems and what to do. . . and they could all sit down and talk about it and the parents give support to the kid (Girl, 12)

at school

> (teachers). . .sitting down and talking with them to tell them what is wrong and how, if they are happy or if they are sad and they could fix it (Boy, 11).

and in the wider community.

> If you're really upset just let it all out, don't keep it in. Like the police or someone you could talk to, especially a constable, or a psychiatrist that could get it all out, or a lawyer or something (Boy, 9).

Although teachers did not mention 'talking and listening' as often as the children did in the interviews, many still raised these as key factors in healthy relationships. For many teachers, however, their descriptions had the added complexity of the values and beliefs they carry into these conversations.

> It's with that talk and communication and that discussion that those really strong relationships are built and the trust is built. But the middle class values that we hold, they do have to be suspended so that when we do work and talk with these kids, we aren't left with those judgements that we're going to put on those kids, because that's really damaging (Female, 35-39).

Whereas children described this 'talking and listening' solely as discussions held between individuals, some teachers also described other programs put in place to facilitate this dialogue.

> In my room, the kids do daily writing and they are free to write letters to me, and I will respond to the kids, and quite a few of them take up that option of writing, particularly if they've had a rotten day or something's gone wrong at home or whatever. And they know that they're quite safe in writing to me, and I think all those sorts of things build up the relationship that you have with kids (Female, 40-44).

Where children did mention school programs designed to facilitate talking and listening, the programs were still those that involved structures for discussions between individuals, e.g., peer mediation programs.

> They used to put a red thing in a box and then they used to empty it out after lunch and then they used to open it, read it and then come to your classroom get you, get the person that was involved and talk to both of the people and then they normally sorted it out (Boy, 11).

When identifying adults who are a part of this 'talking and listening' process, both children and teachers overwhelming named the teacher as the key figure in the school setting. The dialogue of these participants strongly supports the findings of numerous educators and researchers including Wang, Hartel and Walberg (1993, 1994) who have argued for the critical nature of the teacher/student relationship as a part of the resiliency process. Children's dialogue frequently produced descriptions of teachers, which used words such as 'really important', 'very helpful', and 'someone who can make a difference'. And most teachers supported the importance of the teacher-student relationship in making a difference for children who are experiences difficulties in life.

> It's the relationship with the teacher that's very, very important because often I think with these kids, that's the only constant thing in their lives (Female, 35-39).

Both groups, however, also named others who could, at times, fulfil this role in what Sergiovanni (1994) calls a 'community of learners.' For teachers, the others named were usually school adults.

> And the kids know they can talk to the principal or deputy about issues that are of concern to them, and there's always somebody there for them to talk to, and we've made that quite clear in all that's happened. It's not a case of 'Go away, I haven't got time'. (Female, 40-44).

For the children, they were more likely to mention peers, along with other adults as fulfilling that role.

> . . .and you don't have to just tell the teacher if you're harassed. You can go tell somebody that you're comfortable with. It's not like just one person you go to. . .a counsellor, or perhaps if a kid's having problems, someone that's sitting near him in the classroom (Girl, 12).

Several times children also mentioned the relationship aspects of programs that were designed with both this and an academic agenda, e.g., Learning Assistance Programs. These programs were described as helpful

> . . .because they have an (adult volunteer) helping them and it's someone who cares about them, because they might not think anyone cares about them at home (Boy, 9).

This mention of other adults in the school community is congruent with the priority given in the resilience process by the Comprehensive Training to Assure Resiliency in Children project (1996) in offering opportunities for students to develop significant relationships with caring adults in the school community. The dialogue of both children and their teachers in this study further strengthens arguments that, even where programs are designed with

an academic focus in mind, the value of the relationships established as a part of such programs should not be overlooked.

While students focused almost exclusively on relationships at an individual level, several teachers broadened their discussion out to talk of a 'caring continuum' that begins at the individual level and extends to the climate and culture of the school.

> Well, I know for me, I've tried to show this group of people that yes, I do care about them, and whether it's just when they come into the classroom I say, 'Hello, how are you today? How was your morning?' Just to show that you are interested in them. The most important thing that the school can do really well is to show them that they're part of the school, that they have a role and that they are needed, and what they want to say, we will listen (Female, 25-29).

Several children and teachers also made reference to relationships as providing a foundation for persuading children to engage in the curriculum of the schools. For children, the connection was made through reference to the role of teachers in 'helping us learn', 'listening to problems we have with work', 'making work fun and interesting' and 'giving us ideas when we are stuck.' For teachers, the connections are more complex but the belief that strong relationships are the foundations of learning is still evident.

> Maybe the social side, the other important aspects are ignored. Yes, it is purely say do the work, mark the work, hand it back again and I don't want any other contact and that can occur very very often and can really bring out the negative aspects in the child (Male, 40-44).

Haberman (1991) warns against institutionalising new forms of pedagogy for the children of poverty, a situation in which many of the children from the Salisbury find themselves. He argues that in many urban schools the dominant pedagogy, supported by the parents, community, and general public and reflected in the quote above, has become one of teacher direction and expected student compliance. Haberman suggests that for children of poverty, 'good teaching' is even more critical than for those from wealthier backgrounds. To break out of cycles of poverty and disadvantage, children in such circumstances are in need of curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluative criteria that value their experiences, support their struggles, fuel their creativity, empower their actions and celebrate their successes. Unfortunately, as MacLeod (1987) outlines in his study of two groups of youth growing up in urban America, schools are all too frequently set up with curriculum, pedagogy and evaluative criteria that favour the interests of the more privileged classes. Schools that have, as these children and their teachers report, a potentially major impact on their ability to survive and thrive in tough times can ill afford to exclude the interests of these children. It is not apparent from the dialogue of these teachers and students that such is the case for the children from these schools. The frequent struggle echoed by teachers in this study to understand and incorporate the experiences of the children in their charge, to recognise and reconcile differing values, and to establish relationships with these children based on genuine

understanding provides hope that the pedagogy of poverty has not and will not find its place in the schools of these children. Because of these complexities, Sarason (1986) argues that one full year of undergraduate field experience in teacher education should be devoted to the study of educational culture. In a profession where voices appear to be growing louder for a greater emphasis on the 'technical aspects of the craft', it behooves us to consider the dangers of 'chipping away at' the educational foundation subjects that provide a forum for these 'struggles of conscience and understanding' to take place. An emphasis on the technical may lose the opportunity to consider the importance of defining genuine relationships in the lives of these children and hasten a descent into the pedagogy of poverty.

Beyond the immediate school setting, both children and teachers frequently mentioned the value of relationships that connect the home and school. Yet again for children, these relationships were described as times of individual talking and listening to help sort out problems.

> They could sit down with them and talk about the problems and ideas to solve them, and, if those problems were at school, then the parent could go the school and say to the teacher, 'There's this going on at your school. Can you do something to stop it?' (Boy, 10).

The prominent place of bullying in the lives of many of these children was again evident in discussing strong relationships across home and school settings.

> If there is any bullying going on the mum and dad can go down to the school if the child is too scared to tell the teacher (Boy, 11).

This scenario of using the home-school relationships to 'sort out individual problems through talking and listening' was echoed many times over by other children. For teachers, the descriptions were more complex.

> I think the attitude to the family that we display is important in getting across to the child that the family do care about them, but their circumstances are perhaps difficult or different, so that we're encouraging the child to all the time think 'Your family do care about you, and your family are OK, even if they are different from some others' (Female, 45-49).

Teachers referred frequently to the problems of 'no care attitudes', lack of support for school programs, and negative expectations from home. And yet despite these complexities, they talked as often as children of the value of establishing these supportive relationships across the two settings.

> I think you need that sort of triangle. It's not just me helping the kids and the kids helping themselves. I think you have to bring the family into it too. It has to be like a team effort (Female, 25-29).

Defining this relationship based on team effort with parents and caregivers in the Salisbury area demands continuing consideration of what meaningful

parent involvement 'beyond baking cookies' really means ('Making parent involvement meaningful' 1998). Once again the struggle for understanding of community values and experiences reflected in the teachers' responses gives rise to the hope that a search for meaningful involvement is taking place.

Relationships in the wider community were also mentioned by both children and teachers. Teachers more often named specific agencies and organisations where children could find a caring and supportive environment. Consistent with the sporting culture of Australia, the most often mentioned organisations were sports clubs in the Salisbury area.

> And sport, I think too, might be more influential out there than the church groups, certainly for some kids and maybe this is where the Anglo kids find some kind of sense of group and sense of belonging is with their sports group... Yes, sport in this community is important and I think the belonging-ness that that can bring would help kids survive (Female, 40-44).

Although many children mentioned organisations in the wider community, more children than teachers struggled to name places beyond the home and school environment that they saw as being able to promote resiliency. Where children did name wider community elements that contribute to protection, the importance of positive peer relationships in the protective process was again evident. Several children saw the wider community as 'the world they inhabit with friends', whether that be the local shopping centre, movie theatre, or park.

For children who named specific community organisations, they too most frequently named sports clubs. And once again, the value of positive peer relationships, in this case through the vehicle of sport, is evident in the dialogue of children. Comments such as those of an 11 year old boy are found throughout the student interviews: 'It is good if you are in a team and you play sport because then you have got more friends.'

Although children frequently mentioned their peers, they also frequently talked about relationships with adults in the wider community as potential sources of help and strength, sometimes through making connective links across different settings.

> They don't really fall out because our dance teacher gives them more encouragement because she got used to this because one of her students didn't want to do school and she gave them encouragement and now they want to do it (Girl, 10).

Comments such as this, echoed by several other children in the study, provide evidence of informal connections across the school and community settings that support the resilience process. Such informal connections support the work of Wang (1997) and others who promote the more formal linking of social and health services with school services within the community as a critical factor in fostering resilience. Neither children nor

their teachers made reference to any such formally linked programs apart from the occasional naming by a teacher of an agency or service that provided support in times of crisis. Beyond crisis, the absence of dialogue about preventative and developmental programs across the settings may indicate scope for exploration and implementation of more such programs that, as Wang (1997) suggests: 'consider the needs of the students and the site-specific strengths and constraints' (Wang 1997: 16).

A strong sub-theme in several student interviews also contained descriptions of a more generalised 'caring community' where the talking and listening occurs among both friends and strangers in a safe environment.

> It is like you walk in, everyone that walks past you---you know them and you just feel safe because you know everyone (Girl, 12).

> And knowing that the people that are in your community, know that they can be there when you need them. They're not just gonna say 'No, I'm not going to help you' or whatever--to know that they're going to help you get through things, and I doubt that anybody would do that, say 'No' to somebody that's in trouble (Boy, 10).

Many of these similar descriptions appear throughout the student transcripts. Wherever the strong positive relationship(s) occur in this 'caring community', whether at home, school, or in the wider community, several teachers and children alike refer to the power of positive relationships in effecting change through the mention of 'one special person' who can make a difference in the lives of children, frequently by taking the time to just provide a safe environment for them to 'talk and listen' to difficulties they experience in their lives.

> Yeah, really. Unless there's somebody who comes along who gets involved with the kid and who is maybe a mechanic or something like that and can switch the kid onto something productive and positive, that does happen to kids. I know that it can be a neighbour or an uncle or someone who works down the local garage who can actually spark some sense of change of direction in kids (Female, 25-29).

> If they saw something that they really liked they'd probably get more upset because their parents are tough on them and everything that they wouldn't buy it, but there's some special person out there that could make their dream come true, and places like that they could go in and just talk to someone there, not anyone special, just talk because you know that they're not a stranger and they wouldn't do anything wrong to you (Girl, 11).

As one boy, aged 10, so eloquently put it on behalf of many of his peers, a community where children are able to flourish is a community where, in the home, school, neighbourhood, and wider community, children are given the message that, 'There's always someone willing to help out in the world.' For many in the Salisbury community, that appears to be both the simple and complex challenge of finding a person or persons in the family, school, and/or

wider community who will, within the boundaries of a safe environment, 'talk, listen, and help them along the way'.

For those with the power to make changes in the community, the challenge is equally simple and complex: to improve structures and processes across families, schools, and the wider community that enable those relationships to be found. The degree to which these challenges are successfully met will, it seems, from the dialogue of these participants, have a significant impact on whether these children and their peers deal successfully with the tough times they face as they grow up.

Beliefs

(a) Beliefs about teacher efficacy: Do teachers 'make a difference?

Considerable research has already been conducted into the impact of teachers' beliefs on their decision making in a number of important areas (see Clark & Peterson, 1986). Of particular interest has been the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy - their beliefs about their capacity to influence significant aspects of student's lives - and their acceptance of responsibility for promoting children's learning and well-being (Ross, 1994). In contrast, very little research has been undertaken on children's beliefs about teachers' efficacy.

During interviews, teachers frequently spoke of their thoughts and feelings about their relative capacity to 'make a difference' in the lives of traditionally defined 'at risk' children. They revealed an understanding of the complex range of factors which impact on children's well-being, including their own actions as teachers. There was, however, considerable variability amongst teachers. At one extreme, several teachers spoke of their perceived lack of efficacy when compared with the all pervasive forces operating within families and the broader community. They seemed to be reluctantly resigned to questioning their capacity to overcome any negative impact these factors may have on the lives of the children they teach.

> Because I see a lot of it coming from home, I'm not sure how much we as professionals can do. I don't know their background and I believe there's only a certain amount we can do. I think with a lot of this, there's nothing we can really do that will make a huge difference. I'm not saying that we shouldn't do anything, but I'm not sure how much of a difference a lot of this will make (Female 40-44).

> You have year 7's and you think, 'What can you do?' You get to that stage, as much as you keep thinking, 'Yes I can make a difference here.' But the end result is that they've left you and with all of the things you've tried, you think, there's not really anything there that's much different, their life may not be much different. I guess I sit back and say, 'You can't win them all'. That's a cynical view but it just keeps coming back and I keep thinking, 'Is there any value in what I do?' (Male 40-44).

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of nested systems, their low sense of efficacy can be to stem from an over emphasis on non-school factors in the micro- and meso-systems. Other teachers, however, were quite clear about their relative capacity to influence children's lives. One teacher revealed her pragmatic views on what she could do in her role as a teacher and what was beyond her capacities to influence.

> If it was a need, I would fix it if I could. Everything that was out there came in with them into the classroom. But I accepted that I couldn't fix it all - I wasn't supposed to fix it all. They knew that I wasn't going to fix it all, and they accepted that. But they knew that if they were tired, I would let them sleep, and if they were hungry I would feed them. They knew that they could get their basic needs met (Female, 40-44).

This rationalisation of the relative agency of teachers in a complex system of factors impacting on children's welfare and development was revealed in other comments by teachers.

> I believe that the classroom teacher is really the person that makes the difference, because they are the main catalyst I suppose, for setting up that supportive learning and working environment, living environment for some of these kids (Female 40-44).

> Teachers are extremely talented people and I think we sell ourselves short; we have an incredible influence on the kids, but the parents have a bigger one I think (Female, 25-30).

> Now I think about it, I believe you can make or break a child for sure. You have the power to do that as a teacher, oh for sure. I've actually had a really bad experience when I was growing up with a teacher. Now that really destroyed me and I had nightmares and everything, but the next teacher I had was just one of those special people that changed it all around. We have the power to do that to the children in our care. So we have the power to build them up (Female, 25-30).

The same teacher suggested that a positive sense of efficacy was linked to broader beliefs about what motivates individuals to enter teaching.

> It could be anyone in kids' lives (who make a difference), but I'd like to think it was a teacher. I think that's why we pick that role, surely. If we don't think we're good guides, we shouldn't be doing it (Female, 25-30).

These revelations about teachers' different sense of efficacy contrast with the views of children about teachers' power and effectiveness. As has been demonstrated already, children almost universally perceive teachers to be very powerful and strong influences in their lives. Many recognised the capacity of teachers to either make life tough for children by 'picking' on them and ignoring their requests for help, or to make a difference for children who are having a difficulties. As several children explained, 'getting into trouble' with powerful teachers often had dire consequences.

> Sometimes you get in trouble and the teacher gets on your back by saying stuff, and they go and discuss it with other teachers, telling them what

> happened and you're always in trouble. And then they ring up your parents and it gets really bad (Boy, 12).
>
> That he was constantly picked on by teachers and friends and people that just pick on him all the time. And that just ruined his life, and made it miserable for him (Boy, 12).

Most children, however, spoke well of teachers and the way they exercise a positive effect on those they teach. They focused on their ability to 'know what to do' in a variety of situations, and their role in 'helping' children to learn.

> They make you learn, they help you with your work, and they help you when you're in a bad situation or something. And, if you're crying, they'll go up to you and ask you if (you are OK). They know what to do if the person would just tell them what the problem is, and the teacher just knows what to do, because they've gone through a lot while they've been teaching. Teachers know what to do because they went through University (Boy, 10).
>
> School is good because most teachers know what to do, they just do everything that they think is good (Girl, 11).
>
> If they don't understand, then they explain it to them. They also help them a bit if they're stuck or something. They just tell them how to do it until they understand and they can do the rest of it (Male, 10).
>
> Teachers are very helpful (Boy, 11).
>
> They help the kids learn (Girl, 11).

These conceptions of teachers are strongly action oriented, suggesting that children accord their teachers higher levels of efficacy than perhaps teachers do themselves. They also demonstrate that most children *expect* teachers to have high levels of agency to fulfil their roles as carers, instructors, managers, and peace keepers. While some teachers may have serious doubts that they 'make a difference' in children's lives, the children in this study unequivocally affirmed teachers' pivotal position of influence within the child's immediate environment.

These insights confirm the importance of teacher efficacy in the resiliency equation. According to Bandura (1993), self efficacy is a regulatory mechanism that influences behaviour through several processes. At the cognitive level, higher self efficacy contributes to the adoption of higher goals, greater commitment to meeting those goals, and the belief that goals will be achieved in spite of difficulties that impede progress. Linked to this are attributional beliefs about the causes of difficulties in students' lives; teachers with higher self efficacy are less likely to attribute difficulties to factors beyond their control and are therefore more likely to accept responsibility for addressing them than teachers who locate their attributions consistently beyond Bronfrenbrenner's (1979) microsystem.

At the affective level, teachers with higher self efficacy seem to be better able to cope with the emotional consequences of facing setbacks in reaching their goals by suppressing overly negative thoughts that lower commitment and performance. They focus on 'the bright side' rather than dwell on the negative (Ross 1994).

Finally, Bandura (1993) maintains that self efficacy influences the range and type of activities teachers choose to engage in; teachers with higher self efficacy 'do' more things to address student difficulties because they believe that their efforts will ameliorate their students' problems. Teachers with lower self efficacy, on the other hand, frequently look to others outside of their classrooms and schools to 'do' something to address the problems they encounter (Soodak & Podell 1994).

While self efficacy beliefs are 'persistent ... performance expectations', they are not static and can be modified (Ross 1994). In recent research about the impact of school restructuring on teachers and students, it was revealed that teachers' feelings and beliefs about their work, their students and themselves were positively affected by planning, discussing, and working in collaborative teams (Peters, Dobbins & Johnson 1996). Teachers claimed that these changed perceptions contributed to lower absentee rates, less teacher stress, and greater teacher commitment and enthusiasm. It was concluded that,

> Changing working relationships can reduce the alienating influence of being 'isolated in a dog-box classroom with only students' (teacher at Adelaide Hills School) without contact with, or the support of other adults with similar needs and wants.
> (Peters, Dobbins & Johnson 1996: 45)

The implications for resiliency promotion are clear; raising teachers' sense of efficacy through supportive collegial activity at the school level is likely to change the ways teachers perceive their students, their difficulties, and their capacity to 'make a difference' in children's lives. As one teacher in the Peters', et al. (1996: 45) study reported,

> It is a very supportive structure and a great deal of honesty has evolved - a willingness to shrug and joke with each other and to support each other ... So, in many ways it has helped to break down a lot of barriers, especially teacher isolationism. Now there is a greater sense of, 'We are all in this together' and we are all contributing to the growth of the kids.

(b) Beliefs about the future: teachers' and children's expectations

Since Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) seminal study of the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement, teachers have been alert to the problem of limiting students' opportunities by implicitly conveying negative and confined views of what they could achieve. Yet teachers in the study revealed that they faced a serious dilemma over whether to promote notions of 'success' that could be seen to be middle class (University study, professional employment), or to accept what they

thought were very low expectations emanating from their local communities. One teacher spoke at length about a former student who challenged her conception of 'success':

> Some of the kids that I taught in my first year that I was here, are working at places like Levi's, on the (sewing) machines, even though they had the potential to go on to University,. You know, these are kids who are 17, and you think, 'Why?' But, on the other hand, and I guess this is the difficulty because you put your expectations on these kids, not their expectations because this particular girl that I met when I was shopping one day, and she was talking to me, has paid off a new car. She's really enjoying what she's doing, making jeans, and she's happy with what she's doing. So you think, is she better off having left school, not having finished year 12, having got a well paid job, being able to pay off a new car at her age, as opposed to struggling to go to University, finishing University and then perhaps not getting a job at the end of it, which is better? She will tell you the job at Levi's is better. So it's really difficult sometimes not to put your own values and judgments on what the kids in this particular area do (Female, 40-44).

Another teacher maintained that her professional belief in maximising each of her students' intellectual potential was in conflict with strong beliefs about 'being happy' held by her students. She described the expectations of one student who had clear but limited aims for the future:

> When she's 19 she's going to be pregnant, she's going to have a boyfriend, and this is the order, she's going to have won x-lotto, she'll go to bingo and she'll go to aerobics. That's her future. It's not what I want for my daughter, and that's where all my perceptions come in. I mean with this child, she has the ability to do tertiary and I can't see her doing that.
>
> I would say it's not fulfilling her potential, and I think as a teacher that is our biggest concern, that we see so many kids who haven't reached their fullest potential, or anywhere near it (Female, 40-44).

These teachers and many others admitted being frustrated in their attempts to change the aspirations of their students.

> I've got one lad in my class who has no ambition to do well at school simply because he's just going to go out to the market gardens out the back and do exactly what the family does. I say to him, 'Sam, what if a terrible thing happens like the bottom falls out of the vegie market, or we have a drought, and you lose your whole crops to the point where the family can't put the next crop in? Where do you go then?'(Female, 40-44).

They often cited the lack of positive parental role models as a reason for children's limited aspirations. While some teachers were careful about appearing to be critical of parents, others quite openly attributed children's low expectations to parental influence. While falling short of contributing to the older 'cultural deficits' explanations of poor academic performance, these teachers were clear about the limiting impact of 'family example' on students' expectations.

> I would like to think that he would have managed to get enough of an education to find himself a job of some sort. Not anything marvelous. I mean, he doesn't have the family example of anything marvelous (Female, 40-44).

> I've spoken to some parents about these kids who are doing so well and succeeding in the classroom and I say, 'Well really they could do anything that they choose to do. It really will be up to them.' It's really hard because when they become an adult, there are kids who break the mould of what their family has done in the past and go on to so called bigger and better things, but other children tend to stick to the same jobs as what their parents have had (Female, 35-39).

As most teachers struggled to satisfactorily resolve the tensions created by their professional and personal valuing of academically linked measures of student 'success', some teachers explicitly lowered their expectations and 'accepted' that most of the children they taught would follow the life patterns of their parents.

> I think they'll just grow up, get a job. The ones I am thinking of, I suppose I'm thinking of certain children, at this stage I couldn't see them going on to any real higher education. I think they'll just get a normal type job within the community, or become parents (Female, 25-29).

> They might go into some sort of factory job I think. I can't see them going academically unless they do their own business, but I can't see them being able to do that at the moment unless they work within the family network (Female, 50-54).

When teachers and children were asked more specific questions about the likely futures of children they had identified as 'resilient' or 'non resilient', their responses were remarkably similar. Both groups saw childhood resilience transfer into adult resilience; there was the widespread belief that children who displayed resilience would continue to 'cope' with life's pressures and stresses and develop into resilient adults.

> Yeah, well I think they're the ones who will cope, again partly because of the view that, 'this has happened to me but the only way that life is going to move on is if I get on and do these other positive things that kind of either fix it or work through it or face it or make a change.' So I think those kinds of kids will deal with it – the knocks (Female, 40-44).

> So I think these kids that are determined to succeed, these kids who have not let it get them down at this point, whether they win or not is completely up to them, and I don't think their circumstances are going to pull them back. I think they're strong enough - they've already shown by 5 or 6 or 7 - that they're strong enough to be able to not let that get them down (Female, 40-44).

> When they grow up they'll be OK, if they're OK now, they'll have a good education, good marks, have a good job to keep them living, buy food, have a house, they'll turn out to be OK, like have a normal life, that's what I think (Girl, 12).

The children, in particular, were very optimistic about the future of these children.

> Well if they stick to their guns and they just try and keep their heads up as much as they can, and eventually they move out of home and then get a nice job, meet a nice girlfriend or boyfriend, settle down, have kids and the rest of your life runs smoothly with a few little hiccups along the way (Girl, 12).

Similar beliefs were held about the enduring nature of non-resilience, probably reflecting some of the low self efficacy beliefs of teachers outlined earlier, and the common understanding of resiliency as, in part at least, a matter of individual constitutional strength or weakness. Rutter (1990: 184) strongly contradicts this view of resiliency with his assertion that 'resilience cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual. If circumstances change, the risk alters'. Yet a degree of determinism still pervades the thinking of many teachers and children.

(c) Beliefs about Self manifested as the 'right attitude'

Research on resiliency consistently identifies the importance of self esteem, self efficacy, self confidence and mastery beliefs in influencing children's levels of resiliency. These beliefs about 'the self' contribute to what Rutter (1984) calls a positive outlook on life, a sense of optimism, and a view that one can accept and meet challenges. He describes these as

> . . .a feeling of your own worth, as well as a feeling that you can deal with things, that you can control what happens to you. One of the striking features of problem families is that they feel at the mercy of fate, which is always doing them an ill-turn. So one important quality is a feeling that you are in fact master of your own destiny.
> (Rutter 1984: 60)

Both the teachers and the children in the study spoke of the importance of 'attitude' - the manifestation of positive self beliefs and personality traits that dispose children to be positive, confident, optimistic, perseverant, and 'in control' of their lives. One girl, in particular, spoke eloquently about her plans for the future and how she would achieve them; she articulated her sense of purpose and the importance of having the 'right attitude' in the following way:

> If they're prepared to work hard they'll be able to get a good job. Yes, and know that they can stretch the limits to wherever they want to go. They could fly to the moon and back if they want to ... If people have the right attitude they can get there. It's all in our dreams (Girl, 12).

Many other children referred to the centrality of positive self beliefs to the achievement of desired outcomes. They also focused on the need for perseverance or determination to 'keep going' when faced with obstacles or difficulties.

> Perhaps saying, 'Be positive', and all that sort of stuff. Like, 'Keep going, don't worry about it.' (Boy, 10)

> It's their attitude. They keep trying. Ones that don't do okay just give up and just muck around and that. They just keep trying and trying and then they come out okay but the ones who just give up just come out not okay (Boy, 12).

> Yes, I think they find something inside, like in their attitude. They think yes, I'm going to do this, you know. They end up doing it and they end up doing well because they put their head down and bum up and then they just do it (Girl, 12).

These comments contain a degree of traditional stoicism that values hard work and emotional self restraint, and rejects intellectualism. These children clearly embrace the 'no fuss, do drama, don't think about it - just do it' philosophy popularised by a certain sportswear maker! However, within their self motivational rhetoric are the seeds of deeper beliefs about the need for personal confidence, a sense of purpose, positive self esteem and high self efficacy. While they don't use these psychological constructs or terms, the children clearly recognise the importance of cognitive preparation and processing when negotiating the inevitable stresses and strains associated with daily life.

Teachers, on the other hand, did use psychological labels to explain the importance of self beliefs. One suggested that non resilient children

> ... lack confidence, they have a negative self-concept of themselves as learners and of themselves as kids, and often they think, 'I don't have any friends, I can't play with anybody, I don't have anyone to play with.' I think the confidence and the low self-concept kind of sets up (failure) (Female, 35-39).

Another focused on the role of adults in the development of children's self esteem and self confidence.

> I suppose it's them developing their own self-concept and they do need to make a choice about who to listen to, who to believe, what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing. Hopefully, they can develop the self-confidence and hopefully if they can become more self-confident in themselves. All people can help, whether it's the community, the school, the parents and the home life, then they'll become stronger (Female, 25-29).

Overall, there was considerable consistency between the comments of teachers and children about the importance of positive self beliefs to the development of resiliency. While both located most responsibility for the development of a 'right attitude' with the individual, some teachers were aware of their role in fostering children's self esteem, self confidence, and self efficacy. Few, however, provided details of how this could be done.

It might be salient, then, to consider the views of Seligman (1995) and Howard (1998) on the relationship between experiencing success in a variety of areas at school (sport, music, chess, school governance, academic fields) and the development of positive self esteem. They maintain that it is important to consider the link between self esteem and school achievement.

Since the 1960's, many studies have indicated that there is a *correlation* between self esteem and school achievement but there is very little undisputed evidence that high self esteem *causes* school achievement. In fact, there is more reason for thinking that the reverse is the case - self esteem is the *result* of success in school (Seligman 1995). As Seligman (1995: 33) puts it:

> Feelings of self esteem, in particular, and happiness in general, develop as side effects - of mastering challenges, working successfully, overcoming frustration and boredom and winning ... Once a child's self esteem is in place, it kindles further success.

Seligman outlines two levels of psychological functioning that comprise self esteem. First, self esteem is to do with feelings: feelings of happiness, satisfaction, humiliation and so on and secondly, these feelings are grounded in the real world and the success or otherwise of our actions in it. According to Seligman, these two aspects of self esteem - *feeling good* and *doing well* in the world - are inextricably linked and the former cannot successfully be taught or fostered on its own (Howard 1998).

The broad implication for teachers who wish to foster childhood resiliency and student achievement is that their efforts should be directed at helping children *do well* in a variety of areas at school, rather than attempting to boost, in a contrived and artificial way, children's self esteem.

Conclusion

Research into childhood resiliency has many attractions. Perhaps the most powerful attraction is that it purports to

> . . .promote hope rather than despair, empowerment rather than alienation, survival rather than victimisation, and pro-action rather than reaction.
>
> (Johnson, Dryden, Hosking, Oswald, & Panegyres 1996: 1)

Bearing in mind our concerns about some of the published literature on resilience, we were committed to a research process that

- gave rise to context-specific, grounded and multi-faceted constructions of the notions by those involved in the research;
- explored multiple conceptions of resiliency;
- took account of the complexity of social systems by exploring the inter-related, dynamic, and sometimes oppositional forces that shape childhood resiliency.

In this paper, we have sought to provide some insights into children's and teachers' views of the construct of resiliency and their thinking about factors that may influence it. We have indicated both the risk and resiliency elements that arose in our conversations. In particular we have explored two themes that cut across both the coded elements in the dialogue and the systems within which the children live: Relationships and Beliefs. Our analysis of these

themes supports the position that resiliency is a multi-faceted construct with critical contextual and perceptual dimensions. The analysis also supports the view that the perceptions of children and adults will share some similarities and also differ in significant ways when considering the construct of resilience.

The results of this study deliver a far deeper and richer understanding of the construct of resilience through the eyes of children and their teachers. Such understanding should give rise to community programs that are contextualised for an Australian urban community and, most importantly, arise out of the perceptions of those most deeply affected--the children growing up within those community systems.

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